

Wenatchee child abuse prosecutions

The **Wenatchee child abuse prosecutions** in **Wenatchee, Washington, USA**, also known as the **Wenatchee Witch Hunt**, occurred in 1994 and 1995 and are examples of the **day care sexual abuse hysteria** that was prevalent in the late 1980s and early 1990s.^{[1][2]}

1 Accusations

The investigation began in February 1992 when Donna Everett, the seven-year-old daughter of Harold and Idella Everett, told her mother that two six-year-old boys in her class at school had attacked her in an alley and had touched her genitals, a charge corroborated by her brother. Idella Everett, who was developmentally disabled with an IQ in the “low 50’s,” reported the incident to a state social worker, who suspected the mother and the child were lying in order to protect the child’s father (who was also illiterate and low-functioning), by blaming the boys for bruises in the child’s genital area. When Idella insisted that Harold would never do that to a child, the social worker decided that both parents were sexually abusing the child in the home on an ongoing basis, even though Donna persistently denied it. Idella was then told that it was in Donna’s best interests to remove her from the Everett home, place her in foster care, and put her in therapy to deal with her issues. Unaware that she had a right to refuse this placement, Idella signed a consent form. Child Protective Services (CPS), a division of the state Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), then continued to investigate the large Everett family for possible sexual abuse.

After repeated questioning, a month later Donna claimed she had also been molested by a family acquaintance. He initially denied the charge, but signed a confession. Since he spoke little English there is speculation that he may not have understood what he was signing. Donna was placed in **foster care** with Robert Devereux, the divorced foster-father of several girls. When, at age ten, she became too disruptive, she was removed and then placed as a foster child in the home of Lieutenant Robert Perez, who had been newly appointed as Wenatchee’s sole sex crimes officer. Perez had no specialized training in this field; the departmental position was held on a routine rotational basis.

In August 1994, a fifteen-year-old girl at the Devereux home was removed and taken to juvenile hall after she tried to poison Devereux with iodine after he grounded her. In an interview with Perez, she accused Devereux

of raping her, as well as his other foster daughters. Perez immediately arrested Devereux, although the other girls in the home did not support her story. The accuser, who has fetal alcohol syndrome, recanted the next day to her DSHS caseworker, Paul Glassen, claiming Perez had pressured and intimidated her, and told her that Devereux “did improper things”. When Glassen reported that his client admitted to a false accusation, Perez immediately arrested him for suspicion of witness tampering and coercion. While charges were later dropped, Glassen was fired and was later investigated for being a participant in the alleged orgies. Juana Vasquez, Glassen’s supervisor, was also fired after questioning the investigation and the placement of children in foster care to facilitate criminal investigations. Glassen and his family then moved to **Vancouver, Canada**, but Perez, who publicly stated that he believed Glassen was a “child rapist”, informed the **Royal Canadian Mounted Police** that he was being investigated for over 50 counts of child abuse, causing him to lose his job there as well.

Perez then interviewed another foster child (one who already had a history of false accusations of sexual abuse), who now accused Devereux of molestation, but it was only after Donna Everett became Perez’s foster daughter that the his widespread investigation of the “ring” gathered momentum. Everett, who would become Perez’s star witness, now claimed Devereux held weekly orgies in his foster home, and further stated that she had been raped by almost every adult she knew, and that the same molestation had occurred to almost every other child she knew. She accused her parents of molesting her; when Perez got a similar accusation from her sister, Melinda, who was also his foster daughter, the Everett parents were arrested and duly signed confessions. When Melinda’s therapist raised the possibility of witness tampering by questioned Perez’s dual role as both detective and foster parent, Perez had her removed as Melinda’s counselor. He also restricted Melinda’s contact with her brother.^[3]

On March 13, 1995, Perez put Donna in his police car with two CPS caseworkers and they drove through Wenatchee and the surrounding area, where Donna pointed out 22 houses and buildings where she claimed that she, and other children, had been repeatedly raped and molested since January 1988. She also implicated a passing delivery man, a taxi driver, and members of the congregation in the Pentecostal church that her parents belonged to, as well as its unordained pastor, Robert Roberson, and a Sunday School teacher, tying up the “sex ring”, which he referred to as “The Circle”, for Perez.^[4] Perez’ method

of interrogation in this case consisted of interviewing his foster daughter at home every night in his home “as a private citizen and a foster parent”, after he returned from work. Perez claimed that she had so many accusations he could only handle a few every night. He did not tape these interviews, and while he says he took notes, he wrote the reports up days later and then destroyed the notes. Perez was later criticized for acting as both Everett’s chief emotional provider and the provider of the key forensic evidence in the case.

Robert “Roby” Roberson, the Everetts’ minister, had originally become involved when DSHS personnel asked him to watch the family for signs of abuse. He believed them to be innocent and tried to gain custody of the oldest Everett child, but was told by a CPS caseworker that Perez would arrest him if he attempted to contact any of the Everett children. Roberson spoke up in the parents’ defense at the sentencing hearing, then attended a city council meeting and gave a television interview about the cases. The day after the interview aired, state and county police searched his church and home, removing carpet samples to look for semen. A week later, the Robersons’ four-year-old daughter was taken from their home and held as a material witness.

Eventually, both Roberson and his wife, along with Sunday school teacher Honnah Sims, and the driver of the church van, were accused of running an organized ritual sex abuse ring from the food bank and East Wenatchee Pentecostal Church and House of God.

2 Arrests

In 1995, forty-three adults were arrested on 29,726 charges of child sex abuse, involving 60 children; Child Protective Services removed some fifty children from accused parents and relocated them in foster homes.^{[5][6]} Parents and Sunday school teachers were charged, and many were convicted of abusing children, often including their own, or their foster children. While some were released, eighteen pleaded guilty, mostly on the basis of signed confessions. All who confessed later recanted; stating that they were threatened that unless they confessed, they would never see their children again. Others claimed they were told that if they confessed they would be treated in the community, rather than go to prison. Many said they were told that if they signed, their children wouldn’t be placed in foster care or put up for adoption. Ten were convicted at trial. Three were acquitted. Eighteen went to prison.

Witnesses in the investigation, mostly from 9 to 13 years old, were often taken from their families and placed in foster care. Many later claimed that they were subjected to hours of frightening grilling and told that if they didn’t believe they had been sexually abused, then they were either “in denial”, lying, or had suppressed the memory of

the abuse. They were also told that siblings and other children had witnessed their abuse, or that their parents had already confessed. Children were also told that if they agreed to the accusations they wouldn’t be separated from parents or siblings. Many of them later recanted. Perez neither recorded nor kept notes of his interrogations.

While several children recanted their testimony prior to trial, these recantations were ignored: “It’s well known that children are telling the truth when they say they’ve been abused. But [they] are usually lying when they deny it.”, Wenatchee Child Protective Services (CPS) supervisor Tim Abbey stated.^[7]

Many of the people convicted were poor, **mentally retarded** and on **welfare**, and their lawyers stated that their guilty pleas were coerced. In 1995, after Pastor Robert Roberson publicly criticized the investigation, he was arrested and charged with eleven counts of the sexual abuse of a child. Roberson and his wife were later acquitted of all charges.^[8]

3 Trial

Prosecutors were unable to provide any physical evidence to support the charges. Donna Everett, the main witness, was unable to remember any of the details of the over 100 rapes she claimed she had undergone, nor could she describe or identify any of the areas, such as the church basement, where she claimed they had taken place. While it was possible that the trauma related to these alleged incidents might cause her to block out these details, the defense pointed out that she was also unable to describe what a male sexual organ looked like.^[8]

When Melinda Everett took the stand, she was also unable to provide any details. Giggling uncontrollably, she was eventually dismissed without testifying.

Donna and Melinda Everett have now both recanted their accusations and say they were pressured by Perez to lie. On June 2, 1996, at the home of Chelan County Commissioner Earl Marcellus, Melinda Everett told Spokane television reporter Tom Grant that Perez knew she had lied, and claimed the detective forced her and Donna to lie about being raped and molested, and that she was physically intimidated by Perez. Perez admitted on the stand during the Roberson trial that he had bruised her arm before she was to testify and that he had been “rough” on previous occasions when trying to physically subdue her.

After Sunday School teacher Honnah Sims was acquitted, and charges against the driver were dropped, Perez continued to pursue Roberson, insisting he was the leader of the sex ring. At the Robersons’ December 1995 trial, in which their daughter appeared as a defense witness, the pastor and his wife were acquitted in three hours. The jury foreman characterized the prosecutions as “a witch hunt.”

After a year of investigation, Robert Devereux was advised to plead guilty on two minor misdemeanors unrelated to the sexual abuse charges, all of which the prosecution subsequently dropped.

4 Conviction review summary

In 1998, law students and faculty at the University of Washington formed Innocence Project Northwest to address the cases of the 18 people convicted and incarcerated. Eventually, all those who were convicted were either freed by higher courts, had their convictions overturned or pleaded guilty on lesser, usually unrelated, charges in exchange for the prosecution dropping the charges of sexual abuse. Five served their full sentences before their cases were overturned; some lost parental rights. By 2000, the last person in custody, Michael Rose, was released, after a judge vacated his March 1995 convictions.^[9]

5 Culpability

“Even now, in Wenatchee, Washington, a mega-ring case against more than two dozen men and women—all of them poor...is winding its way through the courts, with virtually no evidence and no audio- or videotaped recordings of interviews with the accusing children.”^[10]

In 1996, a consultant, retired Bellevue Police Chief D.P. Van Blaricom, hired by a city insurer who looked into how the Wenatchee police ran the child abuse investigations, stated that the cases were handled properly. In 1998, Dr. Phillip Esplin, a forensic psychologist for the [National Institutes of Health's Child Witness Project](#) said that “Wenatchee may be the worst example ever of mental health services being abused by a state ... to control and manage children who have been frightened and coerced into falsely accusing their parents and neighbors of the most heinous of crimes.”^[11]

More than a dozen civil lawsuits were filed by those arrested and by child witnesses against the city of Wenatchee, DSHS, Perez, and other individuals involved in the investigations and prosecutions. In 2000, Wenatchee's victims were further aided by a Washington State Supreme Court ruling upholding a Court of Appeals decision that law-enforcement agencies can be held “financially liable for faulty child-abuse investigations.”^[12]

- **Paul Glassen** received a \$295,000 settlement from the city of Wenatchee, and a letter clearing him of all charges.
- **Juana Vasquez** was awarded a judgment of \$1.57 million in her suit against the state for wrongful termination and retaliation.

- **Robert Roberson**, who was severely beaten when in jail, settled a lawsuit with the state for \$700,000 in damages in December 1999.
- **Harold and Idella Everett** received an undisclosed settlement from the city of Wenatchee, and settled civil claims against DSHS in 2009, in return for a \$25,000 payment. Their conviction was overturned in 1998, and they got back parental rights to their four remaining minor children.
- **Melinda Everett** filed a civil lawsuit in 2011 on the grounds that DSHS should not have placed her in the home of Robert Perez while he investigated allegations that her father sexually abused her.^[13]
- **Honnah and Jonathan Sims** were awarded \$3 million in 2001 by a jury who found Wenatchee and [Douglas County](#) negligent in the 1994-1995 investigations.^[2]

Bob Perez died on Thursday December 12, 2013 at the age of 60.^[14]

6 See also

- [Satanic ritual abuse](#)
- [Day care sex abuse hysteria](#)
- [McMartin preschool trial](#)
- [Moral panic](#)
- [Witch-hunt](#)
- [List of wrongful convictions in the United States](#)

7 References

- [1] Egan, Timothy (December 12, 1995). “[Pastor and Wife Are Acquitted on All Charges in Sex-Abuse Case](#).”. *New York Times*. Retrieved 2007-10-31. After less than a day of deliberation, a jury today acquitted a lay pastor and his wife of all charges of sexual abuse of children in a trial that critics say demonstrated the worst aspects of police misconduct in such cases. The defendants, Robert and Connie Roberson, were accused of being at the center of a sex ring in which children were ritualistically raped and abused. ... Prosecutors offered no physical evidence to support the charges.
- [2] Barber, Mike; Lange, Larry (August 1, 2001). “[Jury finds city, county negligent in child sex ring case](#).”. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Retrieved 2007-11-26.
- [3] “[Wenatchee sex-abuse case goes to jury; Suit alleges state was negligent in treatment of Melinda Everett](#)”. *The Olympian*. March 2, 2011. Firkins said jurors need only

their common sense to realize it was improper for an 11-year-old to move in with a detective who was responsible for sending the child's parents to jail during a case in which the child would have to testify in court as a prosecution witness..

- [4] "Children sacrificed for the case.". *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. February 23, 1998. Retrieved 2007-11-26. On the morning of March 13, 1995, Perez put Donna in the front seat of his police car. Two CPS caseworkers were in the back taking notes as they drove through Wenatchee and East Wenatchee. Donna pointed out houses and buildings where she says she and other children were repeatedly raped and molested since January 1988 -- 22 places in all. Along the way she saw a delivery man and a taxi driver. They were added to the list."
- [5] "A record of abuses in Wenatchee.". *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Retrieved 2007-11-26. The town of Wenatchee, Washington, made world headlines in 1994 and 1995 when police and state social workers undertook what was then called the nation's most extensive child sex-abuse investigation.
- [6] Rabinowitz, Dorothy. "No Crueler Tyrannies: Accusation, False Witness, and Other Terrors of Our Times". New York, NY: Free Press, 2004. 100-10.
- [7] Barber, Mike; Schneider, Andrew (February 23, 1998). "Children sacrificed for the case: Allegations Set Up a Puzzle of Doubtful Ethics, Dubious Facts". *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.
- [8] Egan, Timothy (December 12, 1995). "Pastor and Wife Are Acquitted on All Charges in Sex-Abuse Case.". *New York Times*. Retrieved 2007-07-21.
- [9] "Last child-sex ring defendant released from prison after court action.". *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. December 27, 2000. Retrieved 2007-11-26. When he got out of prison, Michael Rose hugged his mother and just felt relieved that the ordeal of child-sex ring prosecution was over.
- [10] Debbie Nathan, Michael Snedeker. "Satan's Silence: Ritual Abuse and the Making of a Modern American Witch Hunt". New York, NY: Basic Books, 1995.
- [11] "Wenatchee abuses attacked nationally.". *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. May 28, 1998. Retrieved 2007-11-26. The Wenatchee child sex-abuse investigations are the nation's most blatant example of continuing judicial abuse, civil libertarians and nationally known commentators said at a conference here yesterday.
- [12] Dundas, Chad (July 11, 2001). "Focus still on family of pastor charged in child sex-ring case.". *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.
- [13] "Wenatchee sex-abuse case goes to jury; Suit alleges state was negligent in treatment of Melinda Everett". *The Olympian*. March 2, 2011. Seventeen years after allegations of ritual sex abuse rocked Wenatchee, a Thurston County jury will begin deliberations today to decide whether the state was negligent in its treatment of a former foster child at the center of the 1995 investigation. Melinda Everett's civil lawsuit says the Department of Social and Health Services should not have placed her in the

home of former Wenatchee police detective Robert Perez. The lawsuit alleges it was a conflict of interest for DSHS to place Everett in the Perez home as he investigated allegations that Everett's father sexually abused her. She was then 11.

- [14] Provenza, Nick. "Ex-Wenatchee sex crime detective Bob Perez dies ." *Associated Press* at the *Seattle Times*. December 18, 2013. Retrieved on September 29, 2014.

8 External links

- [Wenatchee Witch Hunt: Child Sex Abuse Trials In Douglas and Chelan Counties HistoryLink.org Essay 7065](#)
- [The Power to Harm from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*](#)
- [Concerned Citizens for Legal Accountability](#)
- [Victims of the Fury](#)

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